

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BRIEFING PAPER

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THE WALLENBERG CASE

Raoul Wallenberg, scion of one of Sweden's most prominent families, voluntarily undertook a mission to Nazi-occupied Hungary in 1944 to help Hungarian Jews escape persecution. Wallenberg was acting at the behest of the American War Refugee Board and with the agreement of the Government of Sweden, which provided him with diplomatic status. It is estimated that Wallenberg may have saved as many as 20,000 Jews from concentration camps.

Following the liberation of Budapest by Soviet troops in 1945, Wallenberg disappeared into Soviet custody. The USSR has never accounted for this action, although there is speculation that the Soviets suspected Wallenberg of being an espionage agent of the US.

Since the late 1940's, the Swedish government has attempted to clarify Wallenberg's fate, but the Soviets have not proved responsive. Initially, the Soviets denied any knowledge of Wallenberg. Then, in 1947, the Soviets informed Sweden that Wallenberg had died in Hungary in 1945. In 1957, after repeated Swedish inquiries, the Soviets stated that Wallenberg had, in fact, died in a Soviet prison in 1947. The Soviets expressed regret and blamed the affair on the excesses of the period when Beria was head of the Soviet secret police.

Reports that Wallenberg has been seen alive since 1947 persist and have raised doubts in the West about the Soviet account. In conjunction with Sweden, the US has followed up some of these reports with the Soviets. The Soviets were reluctant to respond and, in 1980, formally and in writing, stated that Wallenberg had died in 1947 and that they would have nothing further to say on the case in the future.

In October 1981, President Reagan signed into law a bill overwhelmingly passed by the Congress. The bill proclaims Wallenberg an honorary citizen of the US and calls upon the President "to take all possible steps to ascertain from the Soviet Union the whereabouts of Raoul Wallenberg and to secure his return to freedom".

In 1982, we suggested that the US and Sweden jointly establish a Wallenberg freedom award which would be used to honor individuals, such as Lech Walesa, who have advanced the cause of human rights. The Swedish government declined to

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support the idea, however. The Wallenberg family does not support any actions which imply that the West accepts the notion that Wallenberg is dead.

The Swedish government continues to pursue and investigate all reports regarding Wallenberg's fate. When appropriate, the issue is raised bilaterally with the Soviets. When Swedish representatives address the Wallenberg case at multilateral fora, such as the Madrid CSCE review conference, we have also forcefully spoken out. Swedish government officials appreciate our support for their efforts to determine Wallenberg's fate. They do, however, see a danger that international efforts on Wallenberg's behalf are perceived in the USSR simply as anti-Soviet propaganda, not as a serious humanitarian or human rights concern, making it more difficult to obtain forthright Soviet responses. Publicly and diplomatically, therefore, the US cannot get out in front on this issue.

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